

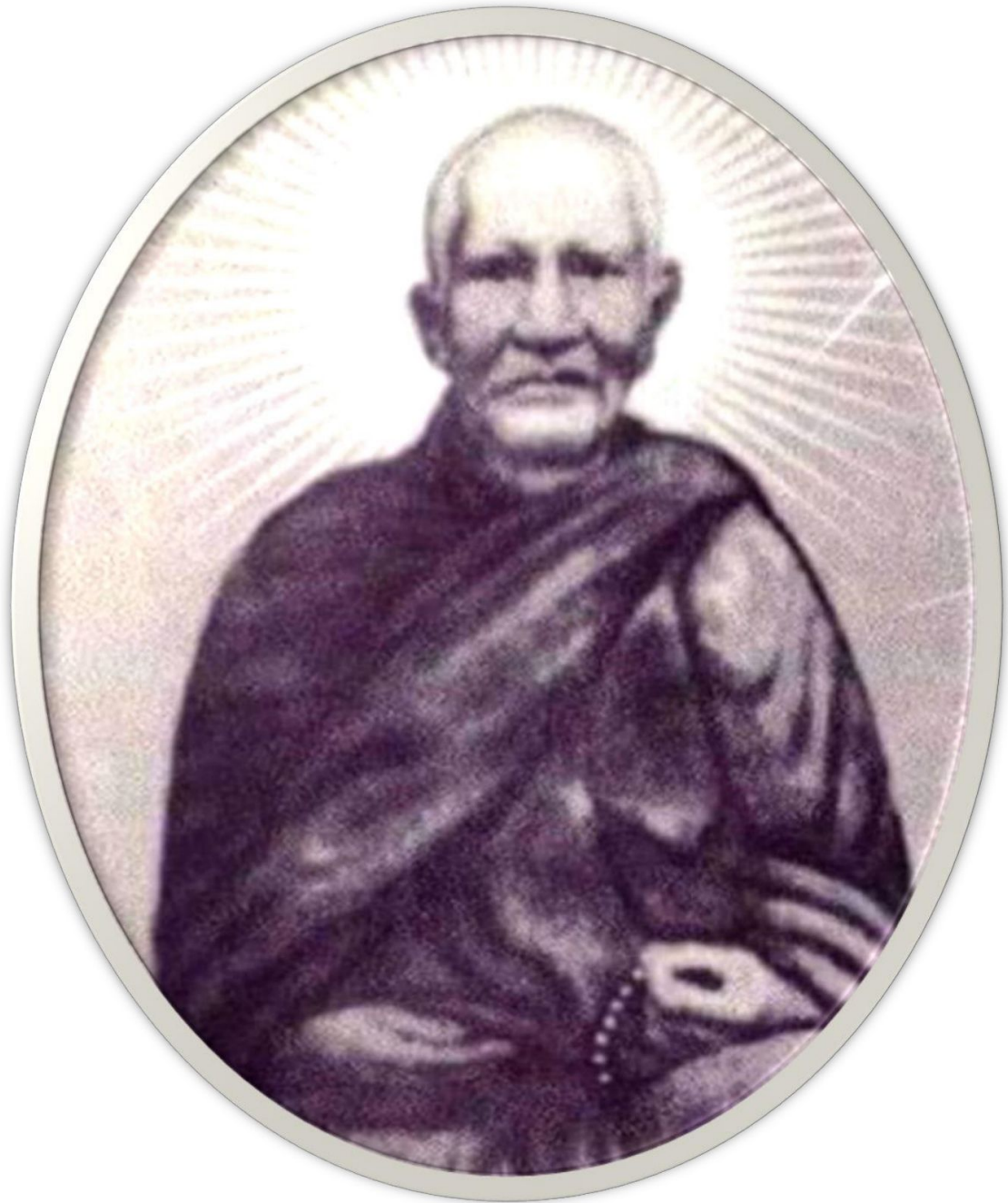
Walking Into the Light of Dharma

A Glorious Journey of His Holiness Saṅgharāja Dr. Dharmasen Mahāthero and His Reflections on the Legacy of His Most Venerable Gyaniswer Mahāthero



**His Holiness Saṅgharāja Dr. Dharmasen Mahāthero
attending to his respected master the Most Venerable
Gyaniswer Mahāthero**

Compiled by
Sanjoy Barua Chowdhury



**His Most Respected Venerable Gyaniswer Mahāthero
December 20, 1887 ~ October 28, 1974**



His Holiness Bangladesh Saṅgharāja Dr. Dharmasen Mahāthero
June 17, 1928 ~ March 20, 2020

Preface

The spiritual village of Unainpūrā is recognized as the home of venerated Buddhist practitioners. The auspicious village is the birthplace of prominent Buddhist monks and scholars who include: Saṅgharāja Puṇḍār Chandramohan Mahāstavir (1834 – 1907); Kripāśaran Mahāthero (1865 – 1927); Śīlānanda Brahmācārī (1907 – 2002) and Saṅgharāja Dr. Dharmasen Mahāthero (1928 – 2020). His most respected Venerable Gyaniswer Mahāthero (1887 – 1974) was born in the spiritual village of Mukhutnait. He led his holy monkhood life at Unainpūrā Laṅkārama Buddhist Monastery for the benefit of seekers and devotees. While residing at the monastery, the most Venerable Gyaniswer Mahāthero not only engaged in the practice and teaching the Dharma to devotees, but also trained disciples who subsequently became illuminated through their devoted practice and wisdom. Venerable Gyaniswer's disciples included: Dharmapāl Mahāthero, former Saṅghanāyok of India; Dr. Dharmasen Mahāthero, the 12th Saṅgharāja of Bangladesh; Śīlānanda Brahmācārī, a reputed Buddhist scholar and author of numerous Buddhist texts and Satyapriya Mahāthero, a philanthropical social worker and esteemed Buddhist monk.

Walking Into the Light of Dharma is a commemorative biography, revering His Holiness Saṅgharāja Dr. Dharmasen Mahāthero, the 12th Supreme Patriarch of Bangladesh and his reflection on the insightful teachings of his master, the most Venerable Gyaniswer Mahāthero. Honoring the passing of His Holiness Saṅgharāja Dr. Dharmasen Mahāthero, heartfelt messages and letters of condolence from global Buddhist teachers and scholars include: His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama; the most Ven. Bhikkhu Bodhi, prominent Buddhist scholar and Pāli translator; Prof. Dr. Kapila Abhayawansa, Vice Rector of International Buddhist College (IBC) of Thailand; Prof. Dr. Phra Rajapariyatkavi, Rector of Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University (MCU) of Thailand, Prof. Dr. Tilak Kariyawasam, Emeritus Scholar from IBC and Prof. Dr. Phramaha Hansa Dahmmahaso, Director of International Buddhist Studies College (IBSC), MCU of Thailand.

My utmost gratitude to Mr. Sajib Barua Diamond, General Secretary of Bangladesh Bouddha Juba Parishad (BBJP), his wife, Mrs. Mhowsumi Barua and their son, Nilambar Barua for their compassionate support in the publication of this book, honoring of the late Saṅgharāja Dr. Dharmasen Mahāthero. Sādhu Sādhu Sādhu for their generosity of heart and kind donations.

A deep bow of respect and gratitude to His Most Respected Venerable Gyaniswer Mahāthero and his humble disciple, the late His Holiness Bangladesh Saṅgharāja Dr. Dharmasen Mahāthero. The village of Unainpūrā and the entire Buddhist community of Bangladesh are grateful for their compassionate mentoring and immeasurable support while on the path to awakening.

Since I was born in the auspicious village of Unainpūrā, it is not complete if I do not acknowledge my beloved family members who bestowed upon me and introduced me to the light of Dharma. With great honor and respect, I pay tribute to my late grandparents: Dr. Amalendu Bikash Barua Chowdhury and Kalyani Barua Chowdhury; late uncles and father: Udayan Barua Chowdhury, Pabitra Barua Chowdhury, Aparuph Barua Chowdhury, Soumitra Barua Chowdhury Neheruph, Sneherup Barua Chowdhury and Sushim Barua Chowdhury Pancharuph; my beloved aunts and mother, Alo Rani Barua Chowdhury, Ruma Barua Chowdhury and Ratna Barua Chowdhury.

Sanjoy Barua Chowdhury
A Devotee of Unainpūrā Laṅkārama Buddhist Monastery
June 21, 2020; Email: sanjoybaruachy@hotmail.com



THE DALAI LAMA

10 April 2020

Spiritual Brothers and Sisters
Unaipura Lankarama Buddhist Monastery
Chittagong
BANGLADESH

Dear Spiritual Brothers and Sisters, ,

It is with sadness that I learnt today of the recent passing away of the Most Venerable Sangharaja, Dr. Dharmasen Mahathero, the 12th Supreme Patriarch of Bangladesh.

It is wonderful that he lived to the age of 92 and that during his long life he dedicated himself to the service of others. I offer prayers for my departed spiritual brother and please convey my condolences to his many followers.

With my prayers,

Yours sincerely,

Buddhist Association of the United States
Chuang Yen Monastery
2020 Route 301
Carmel, NY 10512-3426 – U.S.A.

April 19, 2020

To the Buddhist Community of Bangladesh

Dear Venerables, Friends, and Devotees,

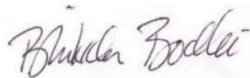
I have learned from my friend Sanjoy Barua Chowdhury about the passing away of the Saṅgharāja of Bangladesh, His Holiness Dr. Dharmasen Mahāthera, on 20 March of this year. His passing must be a great loss to all the Buddhist devotees of Bangladesh and I express to you all my deep condolence.

Although I never had the honor of meeting His Holiness personally, in recent years I have met several bhikkhus from Bangladesh here in the United States, and I have been impressed by their sincerity, erudition, and dedication to the Dhamma. In Bangladesh itself there has been a long heritage of accomplished monks who have upheld the Buddha Dhamma through the centuries. For him to have been conferred with the exalted position of Saṅgharāja, His Holiness must have been endowed with abundant virtues and learning. His passing will no doubt create a void in the Sangha and bring great heartache to the many Bangladeshi devotees who esteemed him and looked to him for guidance. It is wonderful that Mr. Chowdhury has prepared a memorial book to commemorate the late Saṅgharāja.

I trust that the Sangha community of Bangladesh will rise to the challenge presented by his passing and will continue his legacy in the months and years ahead. I sincerely hope that eminent monks of virtue and learning, deeply devoted to the Dhamma, will step forward to fill leadership positions and ensure that the Buddha Sasana in Bangladesh continues long into the future.

I wish you all good health, abundant happiness, and the blessings of the Dhamma.

With loving-kindness,



Ven. Bhikkhu Bodhi
President
Buddhist Association of the United States



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kr̥tākr̥tāparīkṣo'yam mrtyur viśrambhaghātakah |
svasthāsvasthair aviśvāsya ākasmikamahāsaniḥ ||
~ The Bodhicaryāvatāra

Death comes suddenly, like a thunderbolt; it is untrustworthy, it disregards whether we are prepared or healthy. It is an inevitable truth, the *dhammatā* of co-produced factors (*sankhata-dhamma*).

The news of the passing away of His Holiness Bangladesh Sangharaja Dr. Dharmasen Mahathero, the 12th Supreme Patriarch of Bangladesh, on 20th March 2020, has deeply saddened me. I sincerely feel that we have lost not only a prominent spiritual leader, but also a prolific scholar and a great human being.

Nearly nine decades ago, a young child Roshdhar, while facing an unexpected sickness, probably didn't know that this very sickness would be a boon for him and his society. If he were a healthy child, his mother, perhaps, would have never vowed to send him off to become a monk. This story reminds us once again that an adverse situation from the worldly prospective could actually be an occasion for a great spiritual stride - it could be a knock on our door by a messenger of dhamma, the 'dhamma-dūta'.

Dharma Sangharaja's contributions include: giving Dharma talks to establish harmony in his village and wider Bangladeshi community, publishing dharma books and articles in Bengali language, representing Bangladeshi Buddhist Community in congregations and seminars at home and abroad, providing dharma scholarship with a vision to preserve Buddha's teachings, etc. He was also widely known amongst his disciples for providing spiritual guidance, and compassionate mentoring and support. These are unimaginably high feats for a single lifetime.

A child, who nearly lost his life to an unexpected sickness, continued his journey by inspiring thousands during his lifetime. Leaving a legacy behind and touching the lives of many, His Holiness Bangladesh Sangharaja Dr. Dharmasen Mahathero, will always be remembered, fondly.

May his life and deeds inspire and help us all to establish our mind firmly in Dhamma.

I feel humbled and honored to write few words for a commemorative biography of such a great Buddhist leader.

Prof. Dr. Kapila Abhayawansa
Vice Rector of Academic Affairs and
Dean of the faculty of Religious Studies
International Buddhist College, Thailand



**Condolence Message for
His Holiness the Saṅgharāja Dr. Dharmasen Mahāthero**



We were saddened to hear of the passing away of His Holiness the Saṅgharāja Dr. Dharmasen Mahāthero, the late 12th Saṅgharāja of Bangladesh, who was a true spiritual leader who made a great contribution to the propagation of the Buddha's Dhamma, to the salvation of all sentient beings, to the development of Bangladesh Buddhism, to the development of Buddhist education, and to the flourishing of Dhamma brotherhood between Bangladesh and other Buddhist countries. His passing is not just a great loss for the country of Bangladesh but for all Buddhists around the world.

His Holiness the Saṅgharāja Dr. Dharmasen Mahāthero was a noble friend to all mankind, especially to those in greatest need, often showing compassion and lending a helping hand to others. By virtue of his dedication he will be remembered with deep affection, both in Bangladesh and worldwide, for a long time to come. His passing is a genuine loss for all Buddhists around the world. As the Buddhist Monks always recite the Buddha's words on this occasion which I quote in Pali:

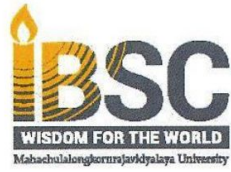
*Aniccā vata saṅkhārā Uppāda vaya dhamminō
Uppajjitvā nirujjhanti tesam vūpasamō sukhō*

All component things are impermanent because they arise and pass away.
Any kind of cessation of the component things is conducive to happiness.

May His Holiness the Saṅgharāja Dr. Dharmasen Mahāthero rest in peace and find the eternal bliss in Nibbana.

Yours Sincerely in the Dhamma,

(Ven. Prof. Dr. Phra Rajapariyatkavi)
Rector, Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University,
Ayutthaya, Thailand



International
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Studies
College



**Condolence Message for
His Holiness the Saṅgharāja Dr. Dharmasen Mahāthero**



We were saddened to learn of the passing of His Holiness the Saṅgharāja Dr. Dharmasen Mahāthero, the late 12th Saṅgharāja of Bangladesh, who was an important messenger in the propagation of the Lord Buddha's teaching, and he was one who served the cause of Buddhist unity, in numerous ways, throughout his life. He promoted the development of Buddhist Education and social welfares of Buddhists in Bangladesh. He was well known throughout the world for his integrity, and for his dedication to the Dhamma and the Vinaya, His Holiness will be remembered with deep affection, both at home and abroad, for a long time to come. His passing is a genuine loss for all Buddhists around the world.

His Holiness the Saṅgharāja Dr. Dharmasen Mahāthero has been a source of inspiration for all Buddhists in Bangladesh and around the world. He has lived a simple life for the great cause of Buddhism and because of his dedication he has contributed a lot for the progress of the Buddhists and people in general. So, all the Buddhists have lost the great spiritual leader under whose guidance our Buddhism has flourished worldwide. His great life and achievements remind us of the following the Buddha's words on this occasion which I quote in Pali:

*Idaṃ maraṇaṃ nāma na ekasmiṃ t̄hāne,
na ca ekasseva hoti,
yāvatā pana bhavappavatti nāma atthi,
sabbasattānaṃ maraṇaṃ hotiyeva,
ekasaṅkhāropi nicco nāma natthi.*

That which is called death is not confined to one place or to one person,
but is common to all creatures who are born in to this world.
Not one of Elements of Being is permanent.

May His Holiness the Saṅgharāja Dr. Dharmasen Mahāthero rest in peace and find eternal bliss in Nibbana

Yours Sincerely in the Dhamma,

(Ven. Assoc. Prof. Dr. Phramaha Hansa dhammaso)
Director, International Buddhist Studies College,
Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University,
Ayutthaya, Thailand



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**It is with deep sorrow I write this letter of Condolence for the late His Holiness
Bangladesh Sanghaaja Dr. Dharmasena Mahathera.**

As I read the biography of H. H. Sangharaja Dr. Dharmasena Mahathera, he was born in 1928 in Unanipura, Bangladesh and entered to the Buddhist Ordination at the age of 14 in 1942. He received the Higher Ordination in 1947. Since then he dedicated in the service as a Buddhist monk for the Bangladesh Buddhist society including lay people and clergy. Considering his yoman service to the Bangladesh Buddhist Society, he was appointed as a supreme patriarch of Bangladesh, widely called "Sangharaja" by Bangladesh Sangharaja Bhikkhu Mahasabhain 2004.

Since he was appointed as Sangharaja of Bangladesh his services were extended with a double the force as a senior monk as well as a supreme patriarch to the entire Buddhist society of Bangladesh till his demise in March 2020.

H. H. Sangharaja Dr. Dharmasena Mahathera's demise is a loss of a Senior Buddhist Monk who was dedicated for Dharma and Vinaya as well as well service oriented Sangharaja for the entire Buddhist Community in Bangladesh.

May Bangladesh Sangharaja Dr. Dharmasena Mahathera attain the bliss of Nirvana.

Tilak Kariyawasam

Emeritus Professor

Tilak Kariyawasam

Dean –Graduate School, International Buddhist College, Thailand.

A Commemorative Biography of

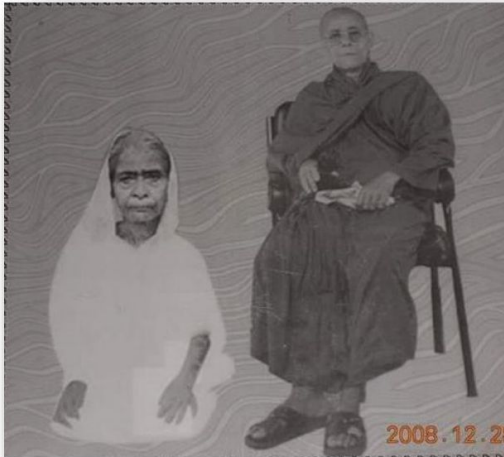
His Holiness Saṅgharāja Dr. Dharmasen Mahāthero

The 12th Supreme Patriarch of Bangladesh

Born on an auspicious Sunday, June 17, 1928, he brought a light of joy throughout the village of Unainpūrā. His parents, Mr. Mahirāj Barua and Mrs. Sūrabāla Devī Barua, lovingly welcomed their newborn baby boy as Roshdhar Barua. His Holiness Saṅgharāja Dr. Dharmasen Mahāthero, the 12th Supreme Patriarch of Bangladesh, more widely known as the “Saṅgharāja of Bangladesh”, was raised in the prominent Buddhist Village of Unainpūrā, under the sub-district of Patiya and district of Chattogram (also known as Chittagong), Bangladesh.

During his early childhood, much to the anguish of Mahirāj and Sūrabāla, young Roshdhar became unexpectedly sick. The symptoms were unknown by local doctors. How could they save their precious son from death? Without any medical treatment and eager for her child’s recovery, Sūrabāla visited the village monastery and paid homage to the Triple Gems. With her heartache and grief for Roshdhar, Sūrabāla approached the altar and made a

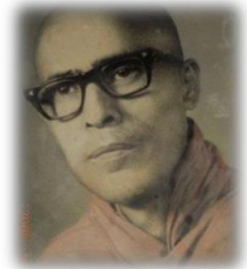
wish before the Buddha praying, “If my son will get well from this unknown sickness, I will offer him to ordain as a Buddhist monk for the sake of the Buddha Sasana.” Miraculously, within several days, young Roshdhar recovered from his illness.



Mother Sūrabāla Barua and His Holiness Saṅgharāja Dr. Dharmasen Mahāthero

preceptor (*upajjhāya*), his most Venerable Gyaniswer Mahāthero bestowed Roshdhar’s formal monastic name as Dharmasen Sraman (*Samanera*).

Throughout his extensive 72 vassas (rainy retreat), Ven. Dharmasen diligently studied Tipiṭaka Buddhist teachings, Pāli scriptural language and monastic discipline (*Vinaya*). It is noteworthy that his preceptor, his most Venerable Gyaniswer Mahāthero, was a prolific Buddhist scholar, as well as a deepened meditation practitioner. His monumental compilation, “Pāli Prabesh” (Entrances to Study Pāli Language) is a prominent textbook at Dhaka University, Chattogram University of Bangladesh and Kolkata University of India.



On the occasion of “Katīna Cībar Dāna” (Annual Robe Offering Ceremony), Venerable Dharmasen Samanera received his higher ordination (*Upasampadā*) at the Ācariya Purnācāra Sīmālaya Ordination Hall at Unainpūrā Laṅkārama Buddhist Monastery in 1947. The Venerable Gyaniswer Mahāthero once again presided at Venerable Dharmasen’s higher ordination (*Upasampadā*) as his preceptor. Apart from his sincere service as an attendant to his most respected teacher, Ven. Gyaniswer Mahāthero, Kolkata University awarded Venerable Dharmasen the title of “Tripitaka Bisharodh”, recognizing him for his brilliant understanding of the Three Baskets of Tipitaka and for his expertise on Pāli texts of the Tripitaka in 1953.



His Holiness Bangladesh Saṅgharāja Dr. Dharmasen Mahāthero receiving Katīna Cībar (robes) from the Bangladesh Prime Minister Her Excellency Sheikh Hasina

Venerable Dharmasen’s Dharma talks instilled a sense of harmony for the villagers of Unainpūrā and larger Bangladeshi society. The notable features of his teachings emphasized monastic order and noble lay teachings and their use as a vehicle for Dharma practice in daily life. Venerable Dharmasen contributed numerous books and articles in Bengali language. His monumental Buddhist works of literature include: *Tiritatna Vandana* (1962), *Vinaya Sangraha* (1978), *Boudho Dharmo Sikkha* (1981) and *Tri-Mahajībon* (1990).

Under his spiritual leadership, Venerable Dharmasen firmly established guidelines and codes of conduct which created a sense of unity for the monastic sangha. For the propagation of the Dharma in Bangladesh, he fostered relationships with prominent based Buddhist organizations: Bangladesh Saṅgharāja Bhikkhu Mahāsabha (The Supreme Sangha Council of Bangladesh) and Saṅgharāja Pūrṇacār Bhikkhu Sangsadh (The Sangha Council of Saṅgharāja Pūrṇacār). A spiritual visionary, Venerable Dharmasen generously offered dharma scholarships for the preservation of the Buddha’s teachings.



His Holiness Saṅgharāja Dr. Dharmasen Mahāthero with the late His Holiness Saṅghanāyaka S. Dharmapāl Mahāthero (second to the left) and his disciple Venerable Sharansen Bhikkhu (first to the right)

An honorary title of the highest esteem, “Saṅgharāja” refers to “The Supreme Patriarch”, which is a tradition found in Therāvāda Buddhist countries, such as Thailand, Myanmar, Laos, Cambodia, Sri Lanka and India. After the 11th Saṅgharāja, His Holiness Shāsanaree Mahāthero passed away, Bangladesh Saṅgharāja Bhikkhu Mahāsabha appointed Dharmasen Mahāthero as the 12th Saṅgharāja of Bangladesh on January 29, 2004. Upon his appointment, Venerable Dharmasen resided at Unainpūra Laṅkārama Buddhist Monastery throughout his monastic practice.



His Holiness Bangladesh Saṅgharāja Dr. Dharmasen Mahāthero with his Kalyanamitra (well wisher) the late Venerable Dr. Barton Yanathiro (Phra Bart)

The 12th Supreme Patriarch, His Holiness Bangladesh Saṅgharāja Dr. Dharmasen Mahāthera represented the Bangladeshi Buddhist community and attended many congregations and seminars at home and abroad. His breadth of Buddhist knowledge, wisdom and deepened practice were imparted through Dharma talks and daily guidelines towards both monastic members and lay people.

His Holiness Bangladesh Saṅgharāja Dr. Dharmasen Mahāthero was awarded accolades from both home and abroad. His honorific Buddhist titles include:

“Aggamahāpaṇḍitasaddhammajotīkaddajak” (Myanmar); “Tīpīṭaka Sahitya Visharodh” (Sri Lanka); “World Peace Model” (Thailand);

“Supreme Buddhist Leader” (Japan); “Atiśa Dīpankara Śrījñāna and Visuddhanandha Gold Medal” (Bangladesh). Also, his tireless contributions to Dharma propagation was acknowledged by world Universities. The Vietnam Buddhist University offered Venerable Dharmasen Mahāthero his first Honorary Doctorate Degree on July 22, 2009. Prominent Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University (MCU) of Thailand bestowed upon him a second Honorary Doctorate Degree on May 24, 2010.

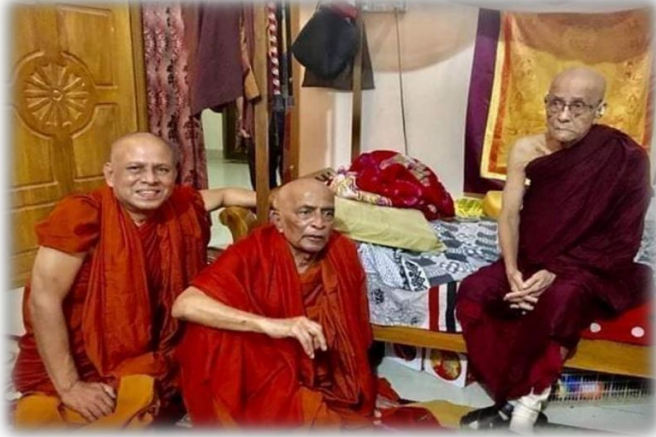


His Holiness Saṅgharāja Dr. Dharmasen Mahāthero receiving an Honorary Doctorate Degree from Prof. Dr. Brahmāpundit (Prayoon Dhammacitto), former Rector of Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University (MCU), Thailand, on May 24, 2010

During the last few years of his life, Venerable Dharmasen’s unstable health condition brought frequent hospitalization. Because of his rapid decline, he was hospitalized at the Royal Hospital in Chattogram on January 1, 2020, for the duration of three months. On March 20th 2020, at 12:58 am (Bangladesh Local Time), His Holiness Bangladesh Saṅgharāja Dr. Dharmasen Mahāthero drew his last breath at Royal Hospital in Chittagong, Bangladesh. A large number of his disciples, beloved relatives and devotees from Bangladesh and throughout the world mourned the loss of their dearly loved spiritual leader.

The legacy of His Holiness Bangladesh Saṅgharāja Dr. Dharmasen Mahāthero (June 17, 1928 – March 20, 2020) deeply impacted the propagation and preservation of Theravāda Buddhism throughout Bangladeshi and Buddhist world. His light of joy rests eternally in the heart of the village of Unainpūrā, Bangladesh and global Buddhist community.

May the legacy of His Holiness Bangladesh Saṅgharāja Dr. Dharmasen Mahāthero inspire us on the path to liberation. May His Holiness Bangladesh Saṅgharāja Dr. Dharmasen Mahāthero attain the bliss of Nibbāna.



His Holiness Bangladesh Saṅgharāja Dr. Dharmasen Mahāthero with the late His Holiness Bangladesh Saṅghanāyaka Suddhananda Mahāthero (second to the left) and Venerable Buddhapriya Mahāthero (first to the left)



His Holiness Bangladesh Saṅgharāja Dr. Dharmasen Mahāthero with the late His Holiness Bangladesh Saṅghnāyaka Suddhananda Mahāthero (first to the left), the late His Holiness Bangladesh Saṅghanāyok S. Dharmapāl Mahāthero (third to the left) and the present Bangladesh Saṅgharāja Dr. Gyanasree Mahāthero (fourth to the left)



His Holiness Bangladesh Saṅgharāja Dr. Dharmasen Mahāthero with Bangladesh Prime Minister Her Excellency Sheikh Hasina, accompanied by the late His Most Venerable Satyapriya Mahāthero and Venerable Sunandhapriya Bhikkhu

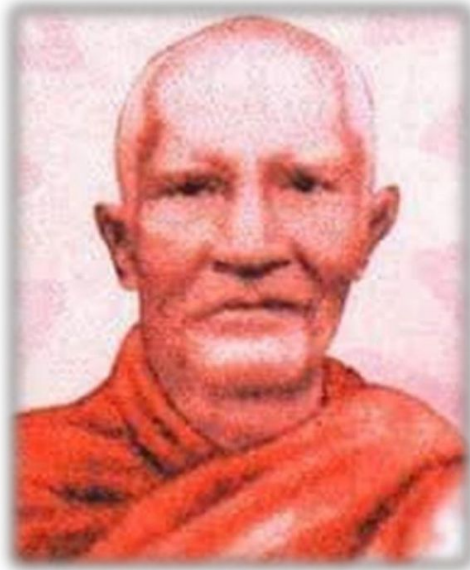


His Holiness Bangladesh Saṅgharāja Dr. Dharmasen Mahāthero receiving dāna from Thai Princes Her Excellency Maha Chakri Sirindhorn

Reflections on the Legacy of
His Most Venerable Gyaniswer Mahāthero
and His Insightful Teachings

As Told by His Humble Disciple
His Holiness Saṅgharāja Dr. Dharmasen Mahāthero's
“Kathāmr̥ita” (Blissful Words)

[Translated excerpts of His Holiness Bangladesh Saṅgharāja Dr. Dharmasen Mahāthero's article, “*Kathāmr̥ita*” (Blissful Words) from the ‘*Mahagyāni Mahājon*’ published in conjunction with ‘*Bhikkhu Paribhasa*’ at Mokutnait, Patiya, Chittagong, Bangladesh, 2009]



*His Most Respected Venerable
Gyaniswer Mahāthero (December 20,
1887 – October 28, 1974)*

The Most respected Venerable Gyaniswer Mahāthero (December 20, 1887 – October 28, 1974) was wise, compassionate, meditative and ever humble. His Most Venerable Gyaniswer Mahāthero not only taught insight meditation (*Vipassana*), but also introduced traditional Buddhist events, such as the *Buddha Puja*, a robe offering ceremony (*Katīna Cībar Dāna*) which included offering honey and medicines to the *Saṅgha* on the occasion of *Madhū Pūrṇīma* full moon day in modern Bangladesh. His visionary thoughts and teachings deeply impacted Buddhist society, as well enriched Buddhist cultures, consequently a generation started to follow his instructions while developing their spiritual journey. He traveled to many places and villages in order to propagate the Buddha's teachings, just as the Buddha advised his disciples (*Saṅgha*): “*Go forth for the sake of the many, for the happiness of the many, out of compassion for the world, for the welfare, the good and the happiness of sentient beings*”. In creating an ideal

Dharma society, his intention was to quell religious dogmas, wrong views and superstitions. His Holiness Bangladesh Saṅgharāja Dr. Dharmasen Mahāthero stated, “Mere words are not enough to explain about the incredible legacy of the Most Venerable Gyaniswer Mahāthero and his invaluable teachings over many years that I (His Holiness Saṅgharāja Dr. Dharmasen Mahāthero) have had living with him. I am going to recall fond memories and significant teachings within this article ‘*Kathāmr̥ita*’ (Blissful Words)”.

(1) During the time of World War II (1939- 1945), the entire country was under the plight of droughts and famine. Many people died from the food crisis. It was an extremely difficult time for lay people and monastic members to have proper foods for their meals. In 1943, at one time, the residing monks of Unainpūrā Laṅkāṛāma Buddhist Monastery were taking meals at the dining hall.

There was a shortage of food, particularly with rice. Monks were struggling to eat poor quality of rice. Having observed the monks' condition on eating poorly cooked foods, Venerable Gyaniswer Mahāthero suddenly asked, "Tell me, what does your food taste like?"

All of monks became quiet.

Venerable Gyaniswer remarked, "Taste itself is merely a response of the tongue. After swallowing the foods, could you feel any taste that remains on your tongue?"

"What is the reason for eating foods?" Venerable Gyaniswer asked.

All of residing monks fell silent once again.

Then Venerable Gyaniswer continued, "People take eat foods for nutrition, energy, vitality and good health. They also eat foods for taste. A practitioner takes meals to remove his hunger, to survive, not for taste or pleasure. Since the rice is mixed with pebble particles and concrete, just treat the concrete and pebble particles as if they were delicious curries and whatever is in your dish, have it all. Taste does not come from your tongue, it comes from the mind."



Buddha Image from the Unainpūrā Laṅkāṛāma Buddhist Monastery

(2) The Most Venerable Gyaniswer Mahāthero dwelled in a modest house known as 'samādhi kuti', which literally translates as the house of meditation. Once his most Venerable Gyaniswer Mahāthero called to his disciple (His Holiness Saṅgharāja Dr. Dharmasen Mahāthero) to his meditation room. Venerable Gyaniswer held his disciple's hand and asked, "How much money have you saved so far?"

Venerable Dharmasen had given an honest and prompt reply to his master and told the exact amount that he had saved.

"Why did you save money?" asked the Venerable Master Gyaniswer.

Venerable Dharmasen replied, "I reserved money for your living expenditures and inevitable expenses that you may incur."

Then Venerable Master responded, “Don’t save a large amount of money. Whatever you have now, reserve half for inevitable expenditures. But don’t save money in a bank. With the amount of money you had saved so far, you can spend half the amount of money.”

“Two things are impediments for an ascetic life, they are: money and women. For the monks who can stay away from these two things, their journey becomes smooth with less difficulties. Consequently, their holy ascetic life will be widely respected by others, in addition, they will be a noble example for practitioners”, added Venerable Gyaniswer.

Then his respected Venerable Gyaniswer Mahāthero thought about how he could spend the money from Venerable Dharmasen’s savings.

A few days later, Venerable Gyaniswer Mahāthero proposed to his disciples to arrange a Buddha *Pūja* Ceremony (offering to the Buddha) with one and a half drum full of *basmati* rice. Subsequently, Venerable Gyaniswer wished to offer another Buddha *Pūja* by lighting a thousand candles. A few days later, the most Venerable Gyaniswer asked Venerable Dharmasen to arrange a *Saṅgha dāna* (offering to monastic members) to share merits to his late parents. By conducting several meritorious offerings to the temple, Venerable Gyaniswer Mahāthero expended all of the savings from Venerable Dharmasen’s account. Needless to say, the most Venerable Gyaniswer Mahāthero never touched any amount of money throughout for the remainder of his monastic life.



Buddha Pūja Ceremony (offering to the Buddha) at Unainpūrā Laṅkāraṃa Buddhist Monastery

(3) On one occasion his Most Venerable Gyaniswer Mahāthero called his disciple Venerable Dharmasen to his modestly small room (*kuti*). It was a lovely afternoon (approximately 13:00) when Master Gyaniswer asked, “Do you recall what are the eight worldly conditions (*loka dhamma*)?”

Venerable Dharmasen replied, “Venerable Sir, there are eight worldly conditions, that arise in connection with worldly life, namely: gain and loss, honor and dishonor, happiness and misery, praise and blame.” Then, Venerable Gyaniswer Mahāthero added, “Well said. A practitioner and meditator’s mind is stable

with all; their minds are not defiled from the eight worldly matters (*loka dhamma*). When someone blames others, refrain from anger and hatred. It’s always wiser to practice lovingkindness (*mettā*) for those who have a defiled mind. They inspire you to practice lovingkindness in action.”

There was a story behind the discussion on the eight worldly matters (*loka dhamma*). Many years ago, his Most Venerable Gyaniswer Mahāthero spent a rainy retreat (*vassa*, an annual three months monastic retreat for *Saṅgha* members) with His respected Venerable Aggamahāpaṇḍita Praggaloka Mahāstavir in Bodh Gaya (present India) where the Buddha became enlightened. In addition to the Theravāda monastic code, the *vassa* denotes a three month annual retreat for a *Saṅgha* member to remain in one place, typically in a monastery or temple ground. During that time, an eminent Buddhist scholar and practitioner, Mr. Bīrendra Lal Mutsuddhi went to Bodh Gaya on a pilgrimage. A group of Sri Lankan monks noticed that the Bengali monks were on pilgrimage during the period of the monastic rain retreat. The Sri Lankan monks then complained to the most Venerable Gyaniswer Mahāthero, “Do Bengali monks observe rains retreat (*vassa*)? Why did they travel from their monastery to Bodh Gaya during the time of *vassa*?” Having heard the complaints about Bengali monks traveling to Bodh Gaya during the *vassa*, his most Venerable Gyaniswer Mahāthero was disappointed.



**Statue of His Most Respected Venerable
Gyaniswer Mahāthero at Unainpūrā
Laṅkārama Monastery**

Hence, Venerable Gyaniswer thought of a skillful way to respond to Mr. Bīrendra Lal Mutsuddhi about the shame given from the Sri Lankan monks towards the Bengali monks who were traveling during *Vassa*. Venerable Gyaniswer Mahāthero acknowledged Mr. Bīrendra Lal Mutsuddhi’s in-depth knowledge of the Buddha’s teachings (*dhamma*) and monastic code (*vinaya*). Venerable Gyaniswer called Mr. Mutsuddhi and expressed, “Dear Mr. Mutsuddhi, you are a wise man. There is no doubt that you have profound knowledge of the Buddha’s teachings (*dhamma*) and disciplines (*vinaya*), but I feel very uncomfortable telling you that it seems to me that negative comments were made which hurt the reputation of Bengali monks.”

“Please feel free to tell me anything, Venerable. I’ll be glad if you explain my mistakes,” Mr. Mutsuddhi humbly reacted.

Then Venerable Gyaniswer said, “Dear Mr. Mutsuddhi, the Buddha instructed his fellow *Saṅgha* to stay at the monastery during their annual three months rains retreat (*vassa*) and reflect on their practice during this period. That is the reason why the *Saṅgha* from the Theravāda tradition remain at their monastery without traveling anywhere during the *Vassa*. According to the Pāṭimokkha (the basic codes of monastic discipline, consisting of 227 rules for monks and 311 rules for nuns), the Buddha instructed that monks should not travel and not have overnight stays during the rains retreat period. If someone breaks this rule, he commits an *appatti* offence and should confess his indiscretion. Since monks or nuns acknowledge themselves as an offspring of the Buddha, breaking the rules from the *Vinaya* (monastic

code) seems to bring disrespect to their father.” Having heard this, Mr. Mutsuddhi promptly asked forgiveness from Venerable Gyaniswer Mahāthero and said, “It was my fault, Venerable. It was me who implored the monks to accompany me on the pilgrimage to Bodh Gaya over this period of *Vassa*.”

- (4) On one occasion, an elder lay devotee (*upāsaka*) approached his Most Venerable Gyaniswer Mahāthero and asked, “Venerable Sir, could you please help me to understand the definition of feeling (*vedanā*)?” Having observed the curiosity of the *upāsaka*, Venerable Gyaniswer thought to describe the meaning and state of feeling (*vedanā*) in a practical way. Then he planned a counter question, “Dear *upāsaka*, may I ask, have you posed this same question to other *Saṅgha* members?”

“Yes, I did”, answered the *upāsaka* immediately.

Then Venerable Gyaniswer said, “Well, since you have asked about this question to others, they might have explained the answer to your question explicitly. In fact, all of them are wise monks.”

But the *upāsaka* replied, “I didn’t understand the explanation of feeling from any of the monks. Therefore, my intention is to ask for your explanation.”

Venerable Gyaniswer abruptly remarked, “You seem to me to be a wise and educated man. You were a friend of my father as well. Despite the elder *Saṅgha* members’ explanation about feeling (*vedanā*), why do you still not absorb it? Shame on you, *Upāsaka*!”

Having heard Venerable Gyaniswer Mahāthero’s sharp answer, the *Upāsaka* was hurt. He loudly retorted, “What kind of Buddhist monk are you? I had just asked you a question and you replied with an outburst instead.”

Then both Venerable Gyaniswer Mahāthero and the *Upāsaka* fell silent. A moment later, Venerable Gyaniswer asked, “Dear *Upāsaka*, what type of feeling (*vedanā*) do you have now after you heard my answer? How many types of feelings (*vedanā*) do you understand now?”

The *Upāsaka* understood the depth behind the inquiry. He felt humbled by his reaction to Venerable Gyaniswer and replied, “Respected Venerable, I have understood the definition of feeling (*vedanā*) appropriately now. Thank you so much for your eye-opening teachings.”

- (5) His Most Venerable Gyaniswer Mahāthero used to practice day long fasting once a week, especially on the day of his birthday. Once respected Venerable Sīlalaṅkārah Mahāthero (the 8th Bangladesh Saṅghārāja of Bangladesh) visited Venerable Gyaniswer Mahāthero and observed his day-long fasting including the foods that he offered for the Buddha *Pūjā*. Venerable Sīlalaṅkārah asked Venerable Gyaniswer, “Why do you offer your foods for the Buddha *Pūjā* instead of taking your meal?”



Sketch of His Most Respected Venerable Gyaniswer Mahāthero (December 20, 1887 – October 28, 1974)

Venerable Gyaniswer answered, “I am not sure how many births I had in my past. In this life, I have a precious human life, along with a rare opportunity to become a Buddhist monk. In gratitude to the Buddha and his teachings, I offer my meals for the Buddha *Pūjā*.”



The late Venerable Dr. Barton Yanathiro (Phra Bart) paying homage to the white-stone statue of His Most Respected Venerable Gyaniswer Mahāthero at Unainpūrā Lanākārāma

(6) During the daily evening chanting, his Most Venerable Gyaniswer Mahāthero emphasized reciting the reflection on the universal well-being (*mettā bhāvana*), reflections after using requisites (*āṭīta-paccavekkhaṇa-gāthā*) and reflections upon the present use of requisites (*paccavekkhaṇa-gāthā*).

Having obtained permission to speak from the most Venerable Gyaniswer Mahāthero, Venerable Sīlalaṅkāra Mahāthero (the 8th Saṅghārāja of Bangladesh) asked, “Since we are already reciting reflections after using requisites (*āṭīta-paccavekkhaṇa-gāthā*), why do we (monastic

members) need to recite the reflections upon the present use of requisites (*paccavekkhaṇa-gāthā*)?”

Venerable Gyaniswer replied, “It is very important to reflect upon requisites after using requisites and to reflect upon the present use of requisites. The reflections upon the present use of requisites (*paccavekkhaṇa-gāthā*) was recited by the Buddha himself, whereas reflections after using requisites (*āṭīta-paccavekkhaṇa-gāthā*) was expressed by the Buddha’s immediate disciples. Reflecting upon the requisites of the Buddha (*Buddha Vacana*), or *Dharma*, is precious. It is important for *Saṅgha* members (monks and novices) to preserve the teachings of the Buddha.”

(7) His Most Venerable Gyaniswer Mahāthero had suffered tremendously from excruciating pain in his old age. Venerable Dharmasen then sought medical advice from two doctors, namely, Dr. Netra Ranjan Barua and Dr. Bhīvūtī Barua from the village of Unainpūrā. Having observed Venerable Gyaniswer’s excruciating pain, Dr. Netra Ranjan Barua immediately prescribed some homeopathic medication. Venerable Gyaniswer was unhappy taking the medicines immediately because they weren’t formerly offered in terms of the Theravāda monastic code (*vinaya*). Venerable Gyaniswer asked Dr. Netra Ranjan Barua, “Why was I served medicine without it being formerly offered? I have committed an *apatti* offence (minor mistake) in terms of the Theravāda monastic codes.” Venerable Gyaniswer immediately instructed to start the

apatti-desana (confession) in terms of protecting his sincere observation of the *Vinaya* rules (monastic codes), even when he was physically suffering from excruciating pain.

- (8) Disciples and followers of His Most Venerable Gyaniswer Mahāthero were curious to know his biography. At one time, Venerable Dharmasen Mahāthero and his Dharma brother, Venerable Dharmapāl Mahāthero (who subsequently became the *Saṅghanāyaka*, the Supreme Patriarch of India), were curious to know the story behind their master His Most Venerable Gyaniswer Mahāthero’s renunciation and his *Dharma* journey to Burma (Myanmar). Venerable Dharmasen asked his master Venerable



The late His Holiness Saṅgharāja Dr. Dharmasen Mahāthero paying homage to his teacher the late His Most Respected Venerable Gyaniswer Mahāthero

Gyaniswer, “Could you please tell the reason behind renouncing your household life? What about your practice? Have you ever attained anything from your meditation practice?”

Master Gyaniswer countered, “Why are you asking me all these questions?” Both Venerable Dharmasen Mahāthero and his Dharma brother Venerable Dharmapāl Mahāthero became silent. “I have taught you *Dhamma* (Teachings of the Buddha) and *Vinaya* (monastic codes). The *Vinaya* clearly states that if anyone claims to have obtained *Samadhi* (absorption) without having done so, he commits *Pārājika* (an offense). For a Bhikkhu (monk), one should diligently follow his duty and practice in terms of *Dhamma* and *Vinaya*.”

Since then, Venerable Dharmasen or any of disciples hadn’t asked His Most Venerable Gyaniswer Mahāthero about his practice and extended biography.

- (9) There are two principal fraternities of modern Theravāda Buddhism in Bangladesh: Saṅgharāja Nikāya and Mahāstavir Nikāya traditions. In addition to the Thai and Cambodia Theravāda Buddhist tradition, there are two principal fraternities, Mahā

Nikāya and Dhammayuttika Nikāya. Moreover, Sri Lankan Theravāda Buddhist traditions consist of two fraternities: Amarapūra Nikāya and Ramanna Nikāya. In Bangladesh, the supreme patriarch from the Saṅgharāja Nikāya is known as *Saṅgharāja*, whereas the supreme monk from the Mahāstavir Nikāya is known as *Saṅganāyaka*. The Bangladeshi Buddhists preceded the Theravāda Buddhist tradition.

At one time, the annual congregation of the Saṅgharāja Nikāya was held at Unainpūrā Laṅkārama Buddhist Monastery which was arranged by the “Bangladesh Saṅgharāja Bhikkhu Mahāsabhā” organization. There was an agenda for all monks (*bhikkhus*) to be united, as if to shelter under one umbrella instead of having two

fraternities: Saṅgharāja Nikāya and Mahāstavir Nikāya. His most Venerable Gyaniswer Mahāthero was one of the supreme monks who had made a heartfelt appeal for the monks to unite under one *Saṅgha*. Venerable Gyaniswer Mahāthero proposed to fellow *Saṅgha* members: “If all *Saṅgha* members agree to be united and abolish the tradition of the two major Theravāda fraternities (Saṅgharāja Nikāya and Mahāstavir Nikāya), we will invite at least five senior *Saṅgha* members from each of the Theravāda based Buddhist countries, such as Sri Lanka or Myanmar, to recite the “Kammavaca” (*Kammavaca* is a Pāli term describing verses from the Tipiṭaka that relate to rituals of monastic life, such as bestowing of robes and ordination). Having reflected (and listened intensively) on the “Kammavaca” recitation from respected elder *Saṅgha* members, both of Saṅgharāja Nikāya and Mahāstavir Nikāya will be united as one, just as the Buddha praised the unity of *Saṅgha*. By following the sincere instruction from the *Vinaya* (monastic codes), both of us from the Saṅgharāja Nikāya and Mahāstavir Nikāya will be unified as one.” Some monks from the Saṅgharāja Nikāya strongly denied the heartfelt appeal of His most Venerable Gyaniswer Mahāthero. Then, Venerable Gyaniswer implored intensely, “In order to collaborate and be united as one, I would willingly forego my senior monkhood in order to start a fresh ordination (*pabbajja*). Let us come together as one united *Saṅgha*.”

As they listened to the heartfelt message from the Most Venerable Gyaniswer Mahāthero, that was the magical moment for all *Saṅgha* members who were in attendance during the gathering.

Reflecting on the legacy of His Most Venerable Gyaniswer Mahāthero and His Insightful teachings, His Holiness Bangladesh Saṅgharāja Dr. Dharmasen Mahāthero remarked, “I was a witness for many prodigious incidents during my attendant period with my late mentor, his most Venerable Gyaniswer. All memories that I had quickly came to light here and there. They were continually on my mind. On this auspicious day of remembering my late teacher Venerable Gyaniswer, I must restrain myself from sharing more about my late Master’s powerful voice and outstanding Dharma spirit. It is very hard for me to make comments about



His Holiness Bangladesh Saṅgharāja Dr. Dharmasen Mahāthero with his teacher, the late His Most Respected Venerable Gyaniswer Mahāthero

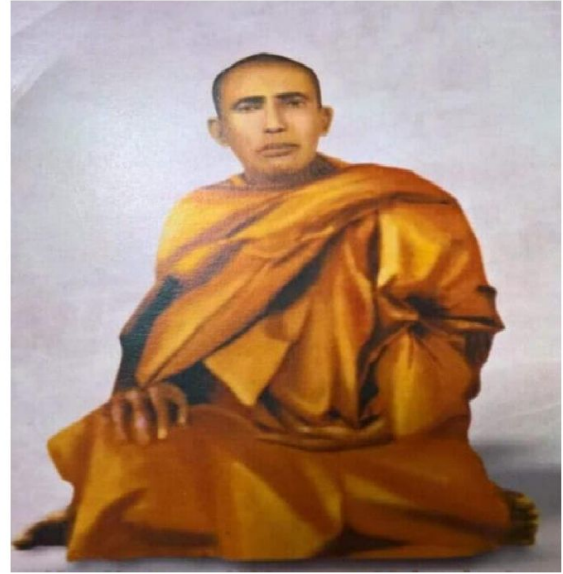
the legacy, teachings and Dharma contributions of His Most Venerable Gyaniswer Mahathero. He will be remembered through his poetic words: *You are far greater than your contribution.*”

May the legacy of His Most Respected Venerable Gyaniswer Mahāthero inspire us on the path to liberation.

**Born in the auspicious village of Unainpūrā,
three prominent Buddhist figures:**



**His Holiness Saṅgharāja Purṇācār
Chandramohan Mahāstavir
(June 19, 1834 – February 4, 1907)**



**Karmayogi Kripāśaran Mahāthero
(June 22, 1865 – April, 30 1927)**



**Eminent Buddhist Scholar Śīlānanda
Brahmacārī
(December 25, 1907 – February 5, 2002)**

*Asevanā ca bālānaṃ paṇḍitānañca sevanā,
Pūjā ca pūjanīyānaṃ etaṃ maṅgalamuttamaṃ*

*Not to associate with the foolish, but to associate
with the wise, and to honor those worthy of honor
- this is the highest blessing.*

The Buddha
(Maha Maṅgala Sutta)